

# ON DRUMS

## *I Promise to Practice Every Day*

As we enter a new year we think about making promises to ourselves, both personally and professionally. For drummers, one such resolution might be to work harder at the craft, and yes folks, that involves the "P word": Practice. Just as baseball players go to winter camp, and just as you went over and over the alphabet in elementary school, the only way to get something down is through consistent practice.

For some unknown reason, the mere mention of the word "practice" produces fear in drummers, particularly students (and I've had my share of them). The key ingredient for consistent practice is the desire to excel. If you realize that there are hundreds of drummers out there who will eat you for breakfast, that just may be the extra push you need to get climbing the ladder.

### **Length of Practice**

The length of practice will vary from drummer to drummer; some can put in three hours a day, others have a tough time logging one hour. The best time to call it a day is when you get bored and tired and the ideas stop flowing. Going past that point, you won't accomplish much. However, I've found a logical way to divide up practice time, so the stuff gets done, and you're also able to put in some "play time."

Home practice (or even on the road practice) can be split into four sections: warm up, reading, technique, and free

play. Each quadrant should be given equal time, but it's always OK to go over your planned time limit for each part. The warm up part can be used to get your hands, fingers, arms, etc. ready for what will come. Good suggestions for this are various stretches, rudimental sticking (or footing) patterns, playing hand to hand patterns at various speeds, etc.

### **Reading Music**

The second portion involves reading drum music, even if just for snare drum, or for full drumkit. No matter what style of music you play, it's always good to gain a solid background in reading and understanding written notation. You may not have a use for it at the moment, but consider your drumming career later in life. You might get into studio work, symphonic playing, or even teaching, and being able to read will help you get through many musical situations you might encounter, and you might even find a new idea or two in the books. There is a multitude of drum books on the market for this type of practice, so search out the good ones and start in on them. Even if you're experienced in reading, incorporating a brush-up in your daily schedule can't hurt.

Working out techniques is the next step, and this can be used either in conjunction with printed material, or on your own, to work out patterns you've heard. At all times, consider the physicality of what you're doing, which is a major part of developing technique — arm heights, hand angles, grips, movements, volumes, and so on. Players like

Dave Weckl and Vinnie Colaiuta have tons of technique, and they've put many hours developing it to their present levels. It isn't the sort of thing you can go down and buy at the corner store — it takes work.

Whenever feasible, try to incorporate a metronome into your practicing. A weak spot for many drummers is their

dropping time from one. My personal motto is "Never Be Satisfied." You can do well, but there's always one step further you can take to do even better. Don't just be satisfied with mastering a specific drumkit pattern. Stretch it out a little more by changing the tempo, accents, feel, and then think of how you can apply it and its variations to

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tempo, and since we all know that steady tempo is a major asset to drumming, it's always a good idea to work with a metronome to improve upon this important part of playing drums.

### **Free Practice**

The last portion of your practice routine is your self-reward for the time you already put in, and that is free play. Free play means, in essence, doing whatever you want to do, be it playing along with records, rehearsing your part in songs played by your band, or just plain "jamming out." You'll be amazed by the ideas that may spew forth! Leaving this section for the last always gives you something to look forward to at the end of your practice session.

Covering all four bases every day enables you to have "perfect practice" each time. Don't take the lazy man's route by leaving out a section, or

songs. Don't be satisfied with one hour's practice — try to extend it a little more each time. Don't be satisfied with your sound, tempo, and technique — you can always take steps to improve upon them.

Perfect practice involves all mental and physical functions. If you set up the routine every day and adhere to it, I guarantee you'll see results (hmmm....sounds like a weight-loss commercial). The drummers that make it over the hump have the drive and skills needed to get to the top of the pile. For every day you make an excuse not to practice, another drummer somewhere is putting in his time and getting ready to overtake you. Look at the competition, think of how hard they work, and realize there's no reason why you should be left out of the running, as there's always room for more good drummers. ■

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